

Gavin: Football could be good for Mustangs

Written by Jim Ecker

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Paul Gavin thinks adding football could be an excellent move for Mount Mercy University if the school decides to head in that direction in the next few years.

He will have an important voice in the final decision as the new athletic director at the NAIA school in northeast Cedar Rapids.

Gavin, 49, has left his job as the men's basketball coach at Mount Mercy after 23 years to succeed Scot Reisinger as the A.D.

Mount Mercy has been studying the possibility of adding football for several months and a final decision is expected by approximately Feb. 1, 2016.

"I think personally - and this is totally my opinion - if done right and done properly, it could be incredible for our university. And if it's not, it could be a detriment," Gavin said Sunday in his first public interview as the new athletic director.

"Knowing this administration and knowing how Mount Mercy does things, they're going to make the right decision that will positively affect the most people. I'm sure the right decision will be made."

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Mount Mercy joined the Heart of America Conference earlier this year, but the membership came with a stipulation: The Mustangs must have a varsity football program by 2018 or face possible eviction from the league.

It would take a huge investment by the university in terms of money, facilities, coaching staff and student-athletes to start a competitive college football program from scratch, but Gavin thinks Mount Mercy could pull it off.

"If done correctly, it's a wonderful thing," he said.



Gavin's selection as the new athletic director set off a chain reaction at Mount Mercy. Aaron Jennings, the successful women's basketball coach for the Mustangs, has already succeeded Gavin as the men's basketball coach.

And Bob Kintzel, who joined the women's basketball staff at Mount Mercy last year, has succeeded Jennings as head coach of the women's team on an interim basis this season.

Kintzel was a highly successful girls basketball coach at Mount Vernon High School, where he won a state title, and he spent two years at Cornell College before joining the Mustangs. He is a former star basketball player at Mount Mercy and is a member of the Mount Mercy Hall of Fame.

Gavin and Jennings held a joint meeting with their teams Wednesday to break the news. Gavin's players knew he was a finalist for the athletic director's job, so they were not shocked by what happened.

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Gavin is ready to dig into his new assignment.

"It's exciting," he said. "I can't wait to get started and get running. But it's bittersweet. I love coaching and everything about it.

"I probably won't miss the late nights and all the travel and some of the recruiting. Most of all, I'll miss the relationships with the players."

Gavin compiled a 387-329 record in 23 years as the head coach with three trips to the NAIA national tournament. He is the winningest men's basketball coach in school history.

Jennings had a 138-90 record in seven years as the women's basketball coach at Mount Mercy. Prior to that, he spent four years as one of Gavin's assistants with the men's basketball program and knows the system.

Jennings said he plans to lean heavily on Carlos Nelson and Martez Creighton, two of Gavin's assistants who have been with the program a number of years. This is the sixth year for Nelson and the fifth year for Creighton, so they know all the players.

Jennings does not plan to make any radical changes with the men's basketball program, but he will incorporate some of the "Princeton Offense" that he learned while playing basketball at Northwestern University.

Jennings is confident Kintzel will do a good job with the women's basketball team.

"I wouldn't have done this if I didn't think the women were in excellent hands," he remarked.

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Like Gavin, Jennings has mixed emotions about changing jobs.

"I'm leaving all of the women's basketball players who I care about a tremendous amount, who I recruited to Mount Mercy," he said. "It's kind of both emotions. Excited on one end and sad at the other end."

Gavin is confident Jennings will do a good job with the Mustangs. He recommended Jennings for the job as one of his first acts after being named the new athletic director.

"He loves coaching," said Gavin. "It doesn't matter if it's men or women or kids. He just loves coaching."

Mount Mercy's new head coaches will be jumping right into the fire. The women's basketball team opens the season this Friday and Saturday at the Grand View Classic in Des Moines. The men's team opens Nov. 3 at Saint Ambrose.